



Navigating Dual Realities: An In-depth Look at Highly Educated Women in Prostitution

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This research investigates the factors driving highly educated women into prostitution and examines the impact of this profession on their lives. Using a qualitative methodology, five in-depth interviews were conducted with women holding master's degrees or professional qualifications, including MBBS, who have worked as prostitutes for over two years. The study reveals that while prostitution offers benefits such as flexible working hours and client autonomy, it leads to significant socio-cultural and economic consequences. These women experience social isolation, emotional desolation, and cultural stigma, even if they are above the poverty line. The research underscores the lack of societal and policy understanding of the complex factors contributing to prostitution, which remains a taboo subject shaped by male-centered narratives.

Key Words: Feminist Perspective, High Education, Pakistan Prostitution, Women

Introduction

Prostitution, one of the oldest professions in human history, involves the exchange of sexual services for monetary or material gain. The term "whore" originated from the Old English word meaning "desire," but has since evolved into a pejorative term, while "prostitute" is considered more neutral. Prostitution is generally defined as engaging in sexual activity for money, though its legal status varies widely across jurisdictions, ranging from severe penalties to full legality (Black, Garner, 1999).

The practice exists universally, with roots that can be traced back to ancient societies. Historically, prostitution was often attributed to male desire and the failure of society to provide legitimate opportunities for women, thus leading them to seek alternative means of survival (Alex, 2017). It has been practiced in various forms, influenced by factors such as economic needs, societal norms, and religious beliefs. Some cultures tolerated or even revered prostitutes, particularly in ancient temple rituals, while others condemned them for their association with immorality.

The modern discourse on prostitution has shifted, distinguishing between "commercial sex work" and "prostitution," with the former often referring to legalized or regulated sex work and the latter to illicit, underground practices. This distinction reflects broader societal efforts to de-stigmatize sex work and address its complexities. While the prostitute's role remains marginalized and often criminalized, there has been increasing acknowledgment of their rights and the need for protection against exploitation.

Prostitution has always been a controversial subject due to its moral, legal, and health implications. Religious doctrines, particularly in monotheistic traditions, have generally condemned the practice, while secular laws often oscillate between penalizing and regulating it. Despite its controversial status, prostitution remains widespread, practiced by both men and women across diverse sexual orientations and cultural contexts (Perkins & Bennett, 1985).

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Sociological theories offer varied perspectives on prostitution. Some view it because of economic systems like capitalism ([Ahmad, 1997](#)), while others argue it is a relic from matriarchal societies, where women exercise sexual freedom without the negative stigma seen today. This view resonates with certain feminist and anthropological theories, which criticize patriarchy for exacerbating the societal stigma against prostitution, focusing primarily on condemning women while often neglecting their male clients.

In short, prostitution is a complex social phenomenon that continues to evolve. Its practice and perception are influenced by cultural, legal, and economic factors, and understanding its history and contemporary implications is essential for developing more informed policies and protections for those involved in the sex industry.

Literature Review

The involvement of highly educated women in prostitution has evolved significantly over time, reflecting changing socio-economic conditions and cultural attitudes. Traditionally, prostitution was regarded as an accepted profession, especially within the Indian system. [Rozario \(1982\)](#) cited that when Chandra Gupta Maurya was alive, women in the court of kings had multifaceted functions, and some of them played the role of entertainers and spies. This history sets a stage where the prostitute's status somehow became related to cultural significance, hence putting their role outside survival function only.

It proceeds with the inclusion of Muslim rulers and [Shorash Kashmiri \(1994\)](#) records the organization of whorehouses in the times of Muhammad Shah Tughlaq and made provisions for dancing girls, showing that prostitution had got an institution or a framework, which was done during the time of Wajid Ali Shah in Lucknow and Muhammad Shah Rangeela in Delhi. The relationship shows that educated women, especially courtesans, possessed more dominant positions in society and helped in cultural and political activity.

Complicating this argument, Ahmad asserts, that Heera Mandi and similar places should not be considered merely as red-light districts; they were centers of culture in the Mughal period. In such places, often well-educated courtesans played the most vital roles in the arts by providing the elite with cultural instruction. Ahmad also emphasized that these districts were strategically located near royal buildings to ensure a steady clientele of soldiers and nobility.

Baber (2000) discussed the socio-political relations of Tawaifs, and he pointed out that most of them belonged to influential families. Such background complicates the notion of prostitution as merely a mode of marginalization. In the late 1970s after the post-Zia regime, most Tawaifs moved to affluent areas and started opening their salons and guesthouses. A good number of examples can be drawn from the cities of Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi.

[Saeed, 2022](#) asserts music, dance, and art have cultural roots in red-light districts of South Asia, hence forming societal perception, essentially implicating them in prostitution. The women born into such an environment might view their involvement as a continuity of the culture rather than an immoral choice, hence putting them in a pretty complex relationship with societal norms.

Furthermore, as stated by Hussain (2002), Tawaifs were much more intellectually and artistically inclined than their followers. The above historical background further proves that brothels were not merely dens of crime but were also the centers of culture in their time because politics and entertainment integrated well.

Currently, the situation is different with regard to education because more educated women join the sex industry because of economic pressure. [Pande\(2018\)](#) found that most of these women had professional backgrounds such as teaching, and nursing, and others who are now joining the commercial sex trade for survival purposes because of economic crises. It is now an indication that the face of commercial sex workers has dramatically changed to being highly educated.

However recent studies have shown educated women entering the high-end sectors of the sex industry, such as escort services and even online sites, sometimes necessarily in order to achieve financial independence and flexibility. A key part of that transition is often to be able to negotiate terms and to enjoy autonomy, allowing some women to see prostitution merely as a means to an end for achieving goals in education, for example.

But with this decision comes its own set of problems. Such women can attain financial security but may live a life of social exclusion, alienation, and psychic distress due to the stigma of sex work ([Chapkis, 1997](#); [Sanders,](#)

[2013](#)). However, they go through phases of drained social life and are unable to expand their personal lives into appropriate relationships, which means a loss in personal well-being because of their choices.

In fact, literature suggests a significant shift in the contours of sex work, particularly with the involvement of better-educated women. Experiences like these reflect a fusion between education and socio-economic as well as cultural dynamics, thus requiring deeper deconstruction while exploring the defining complexities of the shifting narrative. As existing research often overlooks the experiences of highly educated women in prostitution, there is an urgent need for comprehensive studies that challenge established notions and invite a re-examination of societal attitudes toward both prostitution and the women who engage in it.

Exploring the Link Between Prostitution and Feminist Perspectives

Prostitution has long been a contentious issue within feminist discourse, provoking diverse viewpoints rooted in different strands of feminist theory. This essay explores the perspectives of libertarian, radical, and materialist feminism on prostitution, highlighting their distinct approaches and underlying principles.

In stark contrast, Radical feminists believe that the oppression of ladies is the most fundamental form of oppression and presents a model for all others ([McMhairi, 2006](#): 17).

Radical feminists believe that prostitution reinforces and perpetuates the objectification, subordination, and exploitation of ladies which is essential to keep the patriarchy. Andrea Dworkin American radical feminist and ex-prostitute, recollect it to be sexual abuse or maybe rape; the prostitutes are then sufferers, which need to be protected from the abuse of the customers and pimps. Prostitution is sexual abuse and has to be eradicated by way of any manner vital.

Liberal Feminists advocate for personal autonomy and private freedom. It perspectives prostitution as a legitimate preference, arguing that girls need to have the right to determine a way to use their bodies, consisting of undertaking intercourse paintings. This attitude frames prostitution as a shape of labor that, like any other task, needs to be respected and protected under the law.

Materialist feminism believes that the goal situations wherein girls live define their oppression. Prostitution is a reaction to poverty and selected exploitation of girls analogous to the more fashionable prostitution of all who sell their hard work; it should be criminal however heavily regulated.

They argue that prostitution normalizes the idea that women's bodies are commodities, thus perpetuating the subjugation of all women. Radical feminists often advocate for the abolition of prostitution, seeing it as a form of sexual violence that must be eradicated to achieve genuine gender equality ([McMhairi, 2006](#): 17). Socialist Feminism focuses on the impact of class distinctions in society, emphasizing that people, not profits, should be the central concern. Socialist feminists argue that prostitution is a byproduct of class oppression, where individuals, particularly women, are objectified and dehumanized by being reduced to replaceable parts in a larger economic system.

Marxist Feminism takes this critique further by explicitly linking prostitution to the capitalist structure. Marxist feminists argue that prostitution reflects the inherent inequalities of capitalist society, where working-class women are exploited by wealthier men who can afford to buy their sexual services ([McMhairi, 2006](#)). According to classical Marxist analysis, prostitution is a form of wage labor that epitomizes the corruption of capitalist society. The solution to prostitution, from a Marxist feminist perspective, lies in eliminating the economic conditions that force women into sex work. Providing fair wages and meaningful employment to working-class women would, they argue, eliminate the need for prostitution as a survival strategy. Prostitution is thus viewed not just as an individual moral issue but as a systemic problem tied to the exploitation of labor under capitalism.

Prostitution in Pakistan

The history of prostitution in Pakistan is deep-rooted, tracing its origins back to the pre-partition era. Although illegal under Pakistani law, the profession has remained in motion. Historically, red-light districts such as Lahore's Heera Mandi have been famous for prostitution, which was initially patronized by kings and the British elite. Such districts persisted long after the partitions of 1947 created Pakistan as an independent nation, but the industry became increasingly underground again as social stigma merged with legal restrictions.

Pakistan: Prostitution these days falls into three categories, trafficked women, call girls, and professionally born. The victims of trafficking women are sold to brothels and exploited and made to undertake sex work. Call girls are operated by pimps who provide a percentage of their earnings to them in return for security from the victimized woman's customers or any other crime. Some women do so independently for financial purposes. Women born in prostitution usually are controlled by families and are 'taught' sex work, even performance skills such as dancing, ("mujra") to entice the wealthier clients.

There exists an active and thriving underground business of prostitution despite strict legal and religious prohibitions, especially in major cities like Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, and Multan. Sex workers here are found to work in various hotels homes and private places. Sex trafficking and involuntary prostitution still dominate issues- people have been trafficked in countries like Bangladesh and Burma. Women are also trafficked from within the country.

Elite men also sometimes enter into semi-permanent relationships with women by providing for them under the guise of marriage. Corruption, and more particularly, bribery of policemen, sustains this business, especially in red-light neighborhoods where pimps have arrangements with police not to raid during certain hours or days. In a nutshell, though the entirety of the prostitution business is run through shadowy means, the fact remains an open secret in Pakistani society as it depicts graver concerns of poverty, exploitation of gender, and systemic corruption.

Prostitution in Multan

Prostitution in Pakistan, particularly in Multan and other cities, continues to happen as a significant problem of exploitation and human trafficking. The victims, whether male or female, are most of the time deceived or forced into the illegal profession for better job conditions. Poverty plays an enormous role, where a family - one as conscious, knowing of the traffic routes, and only keeping their girls unaware, sends them to the cities in the hope that they can find work or maybe schooling, and be trafficked into prostitution rings.

Among these red-light districts-like the infamous Bazar-e-Hussan and Heera Mandi-are the historical areas known as Multan's "Haram Gate" and "Banson Wali Gali." These have long been centers for organized prostitution. These areas were established during the Mughal rule and were legally recognized until the 1960s, after which prostitution dispersed across the city due to legal bans on brothel houses. The combination of illegal trafficking, economic deprivation, and weak legal enforcement continues to fuel the underground sex trade in Pakistan. Victims are often dehumanized, becoming slaves to the industry, and are controlled by traffickers for financial gain.

Significance of the Present Research

The present study will be helpful in attempting to describe real factors that created a demand for highly educated women in prostitution. This study will enable us to know the conditions in which prostitution occurs and the conditions that female prostitutes face after they are commercially sexualized.

The present study is limited and cannot be generalized to highly educated female prostitutes in the whole of Pakistan, as there still is a great need to investigate prostitution amongst highly educated women, their terms of use of power for prostitution, men's perception of highly educated prostitutes, pros and cons of this business, the role of laws & ordinances as well as that of concerned on this crucial social issue. Men's involvement in prostitution is motivated by their wealth, social status, and sexual desire. Female prostitutes must fulfill their desires moreover they want to or not, because this is what their deal is in return for money. This research will explore all these factors and will provide a comprehensive analysis of the situation of highly educated women in prostitution and the impact of this profession on their lives. This research is just the beginning of investigation in this area and related issues pertaining to this phenomenon and will encourage more researchers to further explore and examine this barren field.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that is selected looks at prostitution amongst highly educated women from a feminist viewpoint that focuses on causes or factors responsible for these women in this field and the impact of this

profession on their lives. Marxist/socialist feminism framework focuses on the economic structures and class dynamics that shape individuals' lives. It would analyze how economic necessity and class mobility motivate individuals to enter prostitution. Marxist feminism considers prostitution as a form of labor commodified within a capitalist system, where economic pressures can push people into various forms of work, including sex work, as a means of survival and financial advancement. The analysis would center on the relationship between poverty, economic necessity, and the choice to engage in sex work.

Research Methodology

Empirical feminist studies are guided with the aid of feminist ideas ([Reinharz, 1992:249](#)). Feminist concept of a wide variety is to be based on, or anyway touch base with, the kind of actual-lifestyles testimonies women offer about themselves" [Lugones and Spelman \(1990: 21\)](#). maintaining the originality and authenticity of how the participants give which means to their experiences is also a part of what constitutes converting the strength imbalance in feminist studies. "A feminist approach gave me the power to be able to relate to ladies: in subjective methods on their phrases rather than in goal approaches on the researcher's terms" ([Edwards, 1990: 489](#)).

In-Depth Interview

In the present research, my aim was to gather an in-depth understanding of highly educated prostitutes and their behaviors. Interviews were organized at different times according to their free time. Interviews were conducted in different situations. Sometimes in their loneliness and sometimes in gathering within the circle of their friends

There were informal sittings with the respondents and related persons and data was collected about their routine work, social activities, issues, and problems pertaining to their lives. Informal sessions were conducted with them to overcome the shyness and hesitance of the respondents. This approach proved very useful because through different techniques the researcher could easily get information from them.

Locale of Research

The locale of a study significantly influences the research process, particularly in qualitative research where the interaction between the researcher and participants plays a crucial role. In this context, the researcher and subjects share a common social location based on gender, facilitating easier communication and understanding during the exploration of sensitive topics such as prostitution.

Multan was selected as the research locale for this study due to its deep-rooted socio-cultural dynamics and long-standing associations with prostitution. As one of Pakistan's largest cities, Multan blends modern urban characteristics with traditional lifestyles, creating a complex environment for the study of sex work. Specifically, areas such as Abdali Road, Bosan Road, and Nishter Road have been identified as key locations where elite clientele seek paid sexual services, often facilitated through guest houses or middlemen. These neighborhoods not only reflect the socio-economic stratification of the city but also serve as residences for educated prostitutes who may own or rent properties in these affluent areas. During the research, three primary locations were targeted: Abdali Road, Nishter Road, and Bosan Road. The plan was to interview five highly educated prostitutes, but reaching those individuals was extremely difficult. Conventional red-light districts, such as the Haram Gate in Multan, are typically comprised of low-educated commercial sex workers, thereby deterring this author from continuing a search in those places for participants who fit both criteria as described earlier: that is, very highly educated and willing to be interviewed.

Engagement was done with fifteen educated prostitutes but only five accepted the request and participated in further interviews. For example, during the interviews, a number of respondents seemed unwilling to come out as prostitutes because most of them preferred telling stories about other people instead of their own experiences. This trend in deflecting discussions on their experiences shows how stigmatized and compounded the profession is. Initial plans to record interviews, both audio and video, were met with resistance by participants who did not like being recorded. Such a context highlights the sensitivities attached to the topic and the need to take much care and respect in conversations with those who are involved in prostitution. Instead, this fluidity of interaction serves to highlight how trust and understanding need to be constructed within the details of Multan's socio-cultural context within which the research is conducted and wishes to be of some significance. This determines the quality and depth of the research output.

The Ethical Consideration for Research

Women researchers tend to involve their own experiences and histories within the research process, thus creating a comfortable atmosphere for participants who can be more candid with their insights. This alignment can also reduce inequalities since, as [Matsumoto noted in 1996](#), affiliation with the context with which the researcher identifies may increase participant comfort. Nevertheless, feminist researchers outside the examined situation could also balance equality levels. In this study, I conducted informal interviews with highly educated prostitutes to explore their personal experiences and the impacts of prostitution on their lives, employing open-ended questions to encourage comprehensive responses. Throughout the data collection, I fostered friendly relationships and expressed positive views toward both the participants and their profession. Recognizing the seriousness of the topic, everyone involved participants, my supervisor, family, and friends approached the research with sensitivity. Each participant sought assurance that their identities would remain confidential, prompting careful consideration of research ethics. To protect their privacy, the names of the respondents have been changed to CS-1, CS-2, CS-3, CS-4, and CS-5, with fictitious names assigned to all key informants as well.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Why do women get involved with prostitution? There are many factors and causes that push them into prostitution and then perpetuate the situation of selling sex. To find out these factors in-depth interviews were conducted, and notes were built to document the conversation that occurred with these prostitutes who have spent more than two years in this profession and continuing it. Nowadays the main causes of prostitution are due to poverty and deviance. However many see it as a profession, a way to make a dwelling, to survive, and to provide for them and for his or her households. In-intensity interviews for this research display that many exceptionally knowledgeable ladies engage themselves in such activities as prostitution by using their own choice, being pressured into it, or because of their own intellectual fitness kingdom. Followings are important causes and factors that played a major role in placing highly educated women in prostitution.

Economic Factor

The economy is the main motive why girls get worried about prostitution. Economic factors played a significant and compelling role than pimp manipulation, heredity or sense of reprisal featured highly in the accounts of highly educated women in prostitution. Highly educated prostitutes who were being interviewed provided alternative explanations. The various reasons given by them have been explored in this study. No doubt it will be something new for many to learn that many highly educated prostitutes deliberately choose commercial sex work as their profession. However, they took that prostitution is an easy job if compared to small-income occupations like teaching in private schools, institutes, and industries due to the non-availability of jobs in the market.

Unemployment

According to the respondents, lack of employment opportunities was another sub-factor that dragged them into this profession. Sometimes young highly educated women must accept jobs where they are sexually exploited. Today there are many cases of highly educated prostitutes wherein fraudulent measures of employers or persons involved in white slavery played a pivotal role in placing them in prostitution. Parents of these girls who usually belong to rural and backward areas are not fully informed about the circumstances their daughters are living in. They send their daughters to big cities only to get an education and good jobs, but they are fully unaware of the hardships their daughters face. Lack of realization from the families that in the absence of a decent job it is difficult for them to keep their self-up while getting an education and after completion. One common suggestion of highly educated prostitutes was that if the government is unable to provide standard employment to the public (especially to women) then it should initiate permissive legalization to include prostitution in standard employment.

Job Incentives More Than One's Capability

Some highly educated women enter prostitution by accepting advanced-level jobs and inflated salaries. Many girls enter different professions in this way and become merely the keeps of their employers at later stages. At last, it

became almost impossible for them to get out of this vicious circle.

Broken Family Structure

Some women entered prostitution with a background of broken family structures or poverty, and they took higher education as their salvation to get them high social status to get rid of vices attached to poverty. Some highly educated women commenced selling their bodies because of loose family interactions. Thus, lack of assimilation and support from their close family relations is one of the reasons behind the indulgence of highly educated women in prostitution.

Lack of Male Family Supporters

This is also an important factor in that the absence/non-availability and denial of financial support of male (s) in a family result in highly educated women trying to get money through any other way to support themselves.

Sole Financial Responsible

Sometimes educated girls had to become the financial heads of the families because of were older and educated as they had no elder brother or alternative male family head. The situation became worse and even mothers were unable to assume such responsibilities. To adopt a reasonable profession such girls/ women must face many immoral difficulties at their workplaces i.e. sexual harassment, insecurity, and fear. The majority of such women must find jobs through some immoral ways to fulfill their financial requirements. Many women entered this profession due to the unavailability of a family support system, especially when they had to take their part as the financial head of the family.

Social Factors

Prostitution can rightly be conceived of as a specific social phenomenon, impacted in many ways by complex social conditions, including economic conditions, cultural factors, and individual circumstances. Very often, through the viewpoint of marginalization, sex workers navigate the most intricate web of social dynamics in relation to issues of poverty, gender inequality, and a lack of access to education and employment opportunities. Cultural views on sex and morality also shape public perspectives about sex workers and those working in their fields. Family and other social networks become sources of risk in some societies but also avenues through which empowerment takes place in others. In understanding these social influences, the lags between the abuses of those in the sex trade may be closed, and well-informed policies can be drafted that help protect their rights and welfare.

Demand Prostitution/Men's Demand of Prostitution

This naturally brings out the male's demand for a supply of women. Historical records show that prostitution was developed on demand of men and today this profession is spreading due to demand. Female prostitution always tends to be hierarchical, and male-dominated. Men play their roles differently in the profession of prostitution. Some rich men need only wealth and women prostitute themselves because they want both things for their pleasant life. Men are the major factor of prostitution, especially in male-dominated societies or capitalist societies.

Affluent men in society may have a second or even a third wife who may be a prostitute with whom they have had a semi-permanent sexual relationship in return for financial support. These men and women do not view their relationship in terms that of a client and a sex worker.

Living Away from Family

During this study, I found out that these women living away from their families, besides socio-economic factors, were more prone to enter prostitution as their de-proximity from their families helped them keep their secret from joining this profession.

Desire for a Luxurious Lifestyle

Media has made our youth very much ambitious for a luxurious lifestyle. The desire for a luxurious utopian

lifestyle and finding shortcuts for the purpose has made our teenagers more vulnerable to prostitution where they can travel, babble, and relish wine to one heart's content.

Inherited Prostitution from Ancestors

There are highly educated women in prostitution who adopted this profession because their families were already involved in this profession and whose basic and sole purpose of getting an education is to learn more techniques and polish their skills to make new and highly astute clientele and retain the already existing, for instance, the knowledge of more international languages, sometimes, ease the dealing with ambassadors or clients coming from the super-elite class.

Personal Factors

If one prostitute enters this profession willingly or forcedly but her personal factors are related to this profession. There are many cases wherein highly educated women are desirous to enter in show business for fame proved susceptible to prostitution. They must go into dark rooms behind the screen before shining on the silver screen. Thus, within a very short span of time, they get popularity, contacts, and fame to make money in this business easily.

Conclusion

based totally on the findings of this observation, it may be concluded that the reasons for prostitution in tertiary institutions are early sexual experience, financial worry, substance abuse, broken homes, and greediness and competition whilst the female undergraduates have an effective mindset toward prostitution. Additionally, female undergraduates' notion of prostitution will decide their attitude in the direction of prostitution. Lastly, the notion and mindset towards prostitution do not range among female students from personal and public universities.

Recommendations

- Primarily based on the findings of the study, the subsequent tips have been made.
- Employment possibilities ought to be widened via all sectors of the financial system to allow ladies to have identical rights of entry to activity possibilities.
- Authorities ought to offer scholarship schemes for underprivileged women college students in the tertiary groups whose parents could not afford to send them to high school or both had no mother and father.
- Management of tertiary institutions must vigorously carry out sensitization programs to teach the girl college students about the hazards of prostitution.

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